

For the Glory of Your Name

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 July 2018

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we have gathered once again this Friday evening, Lord, and it is our privilege and it is our joy to gather in your presence with our little brothers and sisters in Christ to cry out to you in prayer and to hear from you.

And so we ask that you speak to us first from Psalm 79 this evening. Teach us about your mercy, about your justice, about your glory and how we ought to live for it.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. In Psalm 79, a short and sweet psalm, 13 verses, the psalm of Asaph. I'll read it out loud.

13 verses, Psalm 79. Those are lyric sheets.

Brian recycled. Psalm 79. Oh God, the nations have come into your inheritance.

[1 : 25] They have defiled your holy temple. They have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants, the birds of the heavens for food, the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.

They poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem and there was no one to bury them. We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

How long, oh Lord, will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name.

For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation. Do not remember against us our former iniquities. Let your compassion come speedily to meet us.

For we are brought very low. Help us, oh God, our salvation for the glory of your name. Deliver us and atone for our sins for your name's sake.

[2 : 23] Why should the nations say, where is their God? Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes.

Let the groans of the prisoners come before you. According to your great power, preserve those doomed to die. We turn sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors, the taunts with which they have taunted you, oh Lord.

But we, your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever. From generation to generation, we will recount your praise. Amen.

So if you're a Christian, you probably have something in your life that reminds you probably of God's faithfulness and his blessing. Something that maybe is the most kind of surest kind of reminder of that.

Maybe it's your family, your parents or your spouse or your children or maybe it's your job or whatever it might be.

[3 : 27] Imagine that thing that is most precious to you, that to you is the most clear example of God's kindness toward you, is just ripped away from you. And that's really what we find here because that kind of devastating experience can make even a faith-filled Christian doubt and leave them reeling.

And for Israel, the surest and greatest sign of God's favor in their lives was their promised land. It was their city of Jerusalem and it was the temple which represented God's presence in their midst. And in 587 BC, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the temple was burned down to the ground. And this psalm is most likely a reflection after that event in Psalm 79.

And with this, the psalmist reminds us that God delivers his people from their sins for the glory of his name. That's really the main point of the psalm. And then first in verses 1 to 5, we see the plight of God's people.

And then we see in the rest of the verses, the plea for God's salvation. So we'll just talk about that in turn. Verses 1 to 5 with me. Verse 1 begins, O God, the nations have come into your inheritance.

[4 : 38] They have defiled their holy temple. They've laid Jerusalem in ruins. And this is such an ironic and sad sentence because Israel is God's inheritance. They are his special possession. And yet pagan nations, those who are not God's special possession, have come to God's inheritance.

They've come to inherit the land. They've defiled the temple and have ruined Jerusalem. And not only have they destroyed the city and its temple, they have killed God's people in cold blood. It says in verses 2 to 3, They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the heavens for food. The flesh of you are faithful to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem and there was no one to bury them. The nations have decimated the population of Israel so that there are more dead people now than people who are alive to bury them.

So there are dead people who can't even be buried. The streets are filled with the putrid smell of rotting flesh. And the birds and beasts are feasting on them. And this is all the more tragic because it's not just the fickle and faithless people among God's people that met this fate.

But it includes God's servants, it says in verse 2. And it's God's faithful. Those people have also, like them, have experienced this judgment. They've become food for the birds of the heavens and beasts of the earth.

[5 : 53] Everything is seemingly upside down, right? And backwards. Instead of Israel, the nations have come into the inheritance. And people whom God created to rule over the world, over his creation as his representatives, are instead reduced to the bottom of the food chain.

Food for the birds of the heavens and beasts of the earth. And so the psalmist continues his lament in verse 4. We have become a taunt to our neighbors. Mocked and derided by those around us. They're being mocked. And you could imagine the kind of mockery that they would face, right? What happened to your great temple? What happened to your great city? Where is your great kingdom?

Where is your great God? But this has happened to you, right? So that sense of abandonment by God himself is the most difficult, I think, for God's faithful people who are singing this song to bear. And that's really captured in verse 5. How long, O Lord, will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire? And then in verse 6, the psalm transitions to the plea for God's salvation.

[7 : 02] Verses 1 to 2 had noted that the nations have invaded and infiltrated God's inheritance and defiled the temple and ruined Jerusalem. And now in response to that, in verses 6 to 7, it says, Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name, for they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

So these nations don't acknowledge God. They neither know him or call upon him. So they're crying out to God, Why do you let such nations trample on us and lay waste to our city?

Pour out your anger on them instead. But as they're crying out for this kind of redemption and justice upon the nations, the people who are singing this remember Israel's guilt, their own guilt, and that the current plight is a due punishment for their rebellion against God.

Because the punishments that are listed here, what they're experiencing, is exactly what God had threatened in Deuteronomy 28, 25 to 26, for breaking the covenant and being unfaithful to him. And these are some of the covenant curses that are listed there. It says, The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

[8 : 15] And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth. And there shall be no one to frighten them away. Right? I mean, that's almost verbatim, right?

Line after line. It's exactly what God had told them would happen if they were faithless to God and rebelled against him. And it has happened exactly so in verses 1 to 4. And so remembering that what they're experiencing now is their own doing, that their punishment for what they brought upon themselves, they now say in verse 8 in repentance, Do not remember against us our former iniquities.

Let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. This is such a heart-wrenching cry, right? It's like the basis for the plea for God's salvation is not God's justice, right?

Because if God's justice and righteousness were the basis for this cry, this plea to God, then they would be punished because punishment is what they deserved. So instead, the basis for their plea to God is His compassion, His mercy, His grace.

And we see the same pattern in verses 9 to 10. Follow with me. It says, Again, it's in verse 3. [9 : 42] He talked about the nations pouring out the blood of God's people like water all around Jerusalem. And now the psalmist asks God in response to that, Avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.

And this is really helpful and insightful, the way he asks God of this. Because he doesn't say, Help us for our sake. He says, Help us for the glory of your name.

He doesn't say, Deliver us for our sake. He says, Deliver us in a tone for our sins for your name's sake. Why should the nations say, Where is your name, God? The name of God stands for the entire person and presence of God, right?

So His glory. And frequently throughout scripture, we see people praying exactly this prayer. They're praying to God, not to act for their own sake, but to act for His name's sake, for His glory's sake.

And the scripture uses that phrasing all the time, and all throughout Old Testament and New Testament. And that's because God had promised to His people that He would put His name on Israel.

[10 : 41] He would put His name in Jerusalem, on Jerusalem and on His temple. So the fall of Jerusalem and the fall of the temple damages God's name and reputation. And so that's the basis for the psalmist's plea.

And so earlier in verse 4, the psalmist said, We have become a taunt to our neighbors, but now we see in verse 12, that God is ultimately the object of their taunts, right? He says, Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors, the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord.

Right? This is because the name of God is on Israel. The taunts that they are subject to as God's people is effectively and ultimately leveled against God Himself. So the shame, the loss, and the ridicule of God's people falls on God Himself, and this must not be, right?

And so they're crying, Lord, we know we don't deserve Your deliverance. Lord, we know that You are not obligated to help us in any way, but help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name, deliver us and atone for our sins for Your name's sake.

Because as for us, we have been defeated by our enemies because of our sins against You. But You, O Lord, are the sovereign King of all. As for us, we deserve their taunting. But You, O Lord, should never be the subject of such mockery.

[11 : 58] So for Your name's sake, God, deliver us. This is so important. It's true that God saves us for our good also, right? But the scriptural emphasis consistently falls on the fact that God delivers His people from their sins for the glory of His name.

And so our salvation, then, is not primarily about us. It is primarily about God. And our salvation doesn't reveal how lovable and awesome we are.

It reveals how loving and awesome God is. And so it's so easy for us to get that backwards. And the medieval theologian Martin Luther wrote about how as sinners, because of our sinful nature, we tend to be curbed in upon ourselves.

And he says this about that. Our nature, quote, by the corruption of the first sin, being so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, or rather even uses God Himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curbedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.

You guys follow that? It's kind of a self-oriented curvature that we have in our life, in our orientation, that destroys Christian discipleship.

[13 : 24] Because a Christian that is curved in on himself can't weather suffering, right? Because he believes ultimately that this life is about himself and that God should make his life good and easy.

And a Christian that is curved in on himself can't bear constructive criticism. Because he is more concerned about his name and glory than about God's name and glory.

A Christian that is curved in on himself does not stand in wonder at God's grace because ultimately he thinks that it's his goodness, not God's goodness, that's the basis for salvation, right?

And the psalmist knows better than that. So he doesn't pray, help us for our sake. He says, help us, O God, of our salvation, for the glory of your name. Deliver us in the tone for our sins for your name's sake.

And even though deliverance had not yet come to the psalmist and the singers of Israel, in spite of their dire circumstances, people who sang this song put their faith in God and praised him nonetheless.

[14 : 25] And in contrast to the nations who taunted God, they continued to praise him. And that's what we see in verse 13, the conclusion of this song. But we, your people, the sheep of your pasture, we will give thanks to you forever.

From generation to generation, we will recount your praise. Such a wonderful commitment, right? Saying that even though we are destroyed, even though we are experiencing your judgment, even now we will praise you and we will thank you forever.

And because they have faith that they believe that God will deliver them from their sins for the glory of his name. And they continue to praise him. For us, things are a little better, right?

Because that we live in an era of fulfillment, right? And that prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 79 has been answered for us. And this was promised in Ezekiel 26, 22 to 28.

This was God's promise to his people. It says, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.

[15 : 34] And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God.

Even when through you, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.

And from all your idols, I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers and you shall be my people and I will be your God.

So that was the promise and really echoing this psalm. And God fulfilled that promise and answered the prayer of Psalm 79 once and for all through Jesus. By Jesus living for us, living in perfect righteousness and dying an atoning death and rising victoriously from the dead and by ascending to the heavens and sending the Holy Spirit to us so that we have new hearts and we have the spirit of God dwelling us.

[16 : 52] And that's really what assures us of God's presence in spite of whatever we might experience in the world. Because to this day, actually, the Jews in Jerusalem, you know how the temple is destroyed.

The second temple was after this first temple was destroyed again. Now the only thing that remains is the wailing wall, the western wall. That's the last remains of the temple. And they mourn there for the lost temple.

And on every Friday, each week, they recite Psalm 79 because they're mourning the lost temple and they're still longing for God's restoration in that sense.

And we know that Jesus fulfilled the temple, right? That he said in John 2 that he is the new temple of God. And according to 1 Corinthians 3, we ourselves are temples of God by virtue of our union with Christ.

And the spirit of God, the very spirit of God dwells in us. So then, even though we still live in a world that's marred by sin and the consequences of sin, and even though we still sin ourselves, and because of that, there's brokenness in our lives and in the lives of all those around us in the whole world, because of our union with Christ, because of union with Christ who's the temple of God, because of the spirit of God who indwells us, we can always be assured of God's presence with us, no matter where we are, no matter what's going on.

[18 : 16] And so we can say, even better than the psalmist can, that God has delivered us from our sins for the glory of his name. And so then our lives also should be characterized by the praise of verse 13.

But we, your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever. From generation to generation, we will recount your sins.